TRUTH

GEORGE STERLING

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TRUTH

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THE BOOKFELLOWS
1923

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TRUTH is the highest thing that man may keep

—Chaucer

TO

WILLIAM G. HENSHAW

OF

SAN FRANCISCO

FOR THE HONOR OF HIS

FRIENDSHIP

TRUTH

ACT I

SCENE I

A half-hour before dawn, on the eastern rampart of the city Vae. It is broad, and used as a street. Perroh, a soldier and guard, paces drowsily to and fro.

Perroh:

All's well! All's well! All's well!

A Voice from the dark

All's hell! All's hell!

All's hell!

Perroh:

(angrily) Now who comes here?

Egon, a poet:

(entering) 'T is only I,

Old friend.

Perroh:

Ha! you again! Now wherefore cry

"All's hell"?

Egon:

Man, look about you! Is the world

So merry?

Perroh:

Well, it could be worse.

Egon:

Tonight
You've seen at least a dozen starving cats,
Heard twenty women weep, heard old Athoon
Dying of cancer, yet you dare to croak
"All's well!"

Perroh:

All's well at least with you and me;
And who am I to worry about cats?
Besides, 't is but the custom so to cry.
'T is true I have no cancer.

Egon:

What is time
To soldiers? You have leisure to await
Such sores as age shall send you.

Perroh:

I shall die
Among the spearsmen, and not old at that.

Egon:

Perhaps . . . . The night grows chill. This is the hour
When drunkards waken from their noisome sleep
And think they've eaten brass.

Perroh:

The gods are just!
The villains have no right to so much wine,
When guards must go so thirsty, day or night.

Egon:

What would you do if all the seas were wine?

Perroh:

Curse all the gods that I was not a whale!

Egon:

You see! There is no suiting him who wears
The sword. So has it ever been. Ah, well,
At least we've girls to kiss.

Perroh:

And am I paid
In copper or in gold? O for a war!

Egon:

And you to guard the spoil!

Perroh:

I've known worse work.
This stalking on the city wall by night
Is parching toil.

Egon:

And drowsy.

Perroh:

Truth will break
On any tongue, even a singer's! Come,
Hold you the watch a little, while I take
My forty winks.

Egon:

Agreed; but dream for me
A dream in which you see the king applaud
My latest song and send a dancing-girl
To give me others.

Perroh:

Fifty! Take the spear.

(*He lies down, wrapped in his cloak, on the rampart, and in a minute is asleep*)

Egon:

Sleep, kindly brute: thou needest it. How soon
Hath slumber smoothed the violence from thy face!
Perhaps thou'rt now a child again, and roam'st
Thy mother's garden, wondering at the flow'rs . . .
How deep life dips us in its mire! But now
You're clean enough in act and visage. . . I
Was clean before I thought I'd see what life
Was made of. . . I have seen. . . But who comes here?

(*Enter Ogda, a girl of the streets*)

What is your trade?

Ogda:

Nothing that you'd dislike.

Egon:

Aha! a girl o' the town! And late for that.

Ogda:

'Been to a feast.

Egon:

The wine was good?

Ogda:

Aye, good —
And plenty of it.

Egon:

So I smell from here.
Now whither bound?

Ogda:

I'm in no haste.

Egon:

Fear you
No evil-doers?

Ogda:

Let them fear myself!

Egon:

Yet men there be who'd crack your pretty head
For but that purple cloak.

Ogda:

No doubt that's true.

(*Enter Orax, a rich old merchant*)

Egon:

Whom have we now? Your name!

Orax:

Orax, whose house
Is in the street of lilies.

Egon:

Here is one,
And far from home. The maid has been to fetch
A physic for her ailing sire. She fears
Ill usage. Will you not accompany
The damsel to her sill?

Orax:

Be sure I shall!
She seems well-favored.

Egon:

But of humble birth,
With garlic on her breath.

Orax:

Well, so have I.
Come now, fair maid. We both had little wit
To venture forth so late without a guard.
It is the drink.

Ogda:

A blessing on you, sir!
And you, good soldier!

Egon:

'T is all in the trade.
See that your own thrives well!

Ogda:

Aye! that will I!

(*Exeunt Orax and Ogda*)

Egon:

So. They depart. There's ever good to do
For willing hearts. She soon may bless the hour
We met. But will she? . . . Ah! the dawn is near,
And colder seems the wind. Those eastern hills
Grow black upon the sunrise. One more day
To tease us with its mystery.

(*He stirs Perroh with the haft of his spear*)

Wake up!
You've had the hundred breaths of sleep you asked.

Perroh:

(*rising*)
The pest to you! Why did you let me sleep?
I'm drowsier now than ever.

Egon:

So it goes:
Pamper a man and see what you shall get!
What note you now?

Perroh:

(*pointing*) Look there upon the crest
Of yonder hill — what's that against the light?
I see a darkness and a shining. Look!

Egon:

It is so far away I am not sure. . .
Now two seem walking down the slope. . . One's clad
In sober garb; the other is in white.

Perroh:

Swiftly they come, as tho they strode on air.

Egon:

They will come in with morning through the gates.
I would behold them. There is something strange
About the shape that goes in white, far off.

Perroh:

Come then with me. My watch is at the gates
A little longer.

Egon:

I will go with you.

(*Exeunt, Egon singing*)

SONG

'T was far away, 't was far away,
Wild aloe of a night long past!
'T was but an hour I held thee fast,
Who never saw thy face by day.

'T was long ago, 't was long ago,
I kissed thee through thy loosened hair.
I knew that all had found thee fair
Until they found no more to know.

Far off, long since, we took our bliss,
Deluded to a brief embrace.
I, who remember not thy face,
Somehow cannot forget thy kiss.

ACT I

SCENE 2

The eastern gates of the city. Twenty soldiers stand on guard, Eor their captain. An aged man unbars the gates, and his two sons push them outward.

Egon:

Again the gates are opened. How they groan
On ancient hinges! So do agéd men
Whose joints are stiff. Now purely sweeps the light
On dusty pave and threshold.

Perroh:

Here they come —
Those two we saw.

A Soldier:

Guts of Korkamedum!
She's naked!

Egon:

She is beautiful!

Soldier:

O gods,
My thanks for this dear sight!

Eor:

Silence! Stand back!
(*to the guard*)
Your eyes on mine!

Perroh:

(*aside to Egon*) His eyes are hot on her.
No wonder!

Egon:

'T is the Dreamer holds her hand.
They both are mad. His gaze is on the blue,
And she — I cannot bear her eyes!

Eor:

Their hands
Are clasped. Why does he hold her hand? No doubt
The girl's half-witted. He does wrong to leave
Her body nude, for all it is so fair.
He should at least have girt her loins with flow'rs.

(*Uliun, the Dreamer, passes through the gates, holding by the hand a girl as tall as himself. She is naked and unashamed. A crowd begins to gather.*)

Egon:

Who is she, Uliun? Ah, gods! her eyes!

Eor:

(*taking Egon's cloak from his shoulders*)
Her breasts! Her breasts! Take, witless one, this robe,
And cloak the girl. Why did you bring her here
Unclothed? Were there no boughs of early bloom?
Are all the leaves in bud? The wayside rose —
Is that unopened yet?

Uliun:

Nay — shall I hide
Such loveliness? Oh! kneel to it, as I
Have knelt, and kneeling, worshiped!

Eor:

(*to the crowd*) Stand you back!
(*to the soldiers*)
Press back the rabble!

(*They do so, as he cloaks her*)

Suffer, girl, that I
Conceal you from their gaze. What is your name?
Whence are you?

(*She is silent. He speaks sharply*)

Come! Your name!
(*to Uliun*) Is the girl dumb?

Uliun:

Be gentle with her. Shall the gods reply
To all who question? Yet she spoke to me.

Eor:

What said she?

Uliun:

It was in an alien tongue
Of chiming silver and of dripping gems. . .
And yet I seemed to know the words she said.
The king must hear her speak.

Eor:

Ducorial sleeps
Till afternoon is old. Who does not know
The royal usage?
(*to the soldiers*) Press the rabble back!

A Voice

Off with the cloak!

Other Voices:

Disrobe her! . . . Make her dance
Before us! . . . Give us now the girl! . . . Disrobe
The wanton! . . She was well content to go
Without her shift! . . . Give us the girl, that we
May make her dance for us!

Eor:

(*to Uliun*) See now the storm
You've brought upon us! You will pay for this,
Or I'm no prophet.

Uliun:

Take away the cloak:
They too will fall and worship.

Eor:

Take away —
O gods, what babe is here?
(*to Egon*) Where got your friend
His knowledge of the mob?

A Voice

Disrobe the slut!
Disrobe!

Eor:

(*to Uliun*) You hear? What's to be done? The girl
Must not remain before them. Well you know
What's in the rabble's mind!

Uliun:

They crave to see
Her loveliness, and worship.

Eor:

Worship? Her?
Not in *your* manner! Tell us what you'd do
With her.

Uliun:

Disrobe her, that the people see
And worship.

Eor:

All ye gods, both lean and fat!
You'd never know the father of her child!
I say she must be housed somewhere: have you
No home?

Egon:

He has a home, and wife as well,
And children.

Eor:

She shall take her refuge there.

(*to the soldiers*)

Fall in around her! Give the mob the butt!
Back with them! . . . So — that's better. . . . Forward,
now!

The guard conduct Uliun and the girl to his home, followed by Egon and the people.

ACT I

SCENE 3

The house of Uliun, on a mean street. A woman runs to the door and knocks loudly. It is opened by Akar, Uliun's wife.

Akar:

Now what's amiss? My little boy! I sent —

The Woman:

Nay, it is not your child. I —

Akar:

'T is that fool
I wedded! Uliun, who —

The Woman:

Aye, 't is he.

Akar:

Say not that he is dead! O my good man!
My kind and —

The Woman:

Nay, not dead, but worse, perchance,
Than dead, poor Akar!

Akar:

Ha! the villain has
An eager eye for women! Tell me more!

The Woman:

Soon, Akar, you shall know it all. I ran
To make you ready, for my heart is sad
At your misfortune. I shall not describe
The hussy. Every woman —

Akar:

Tell me all!
I say that you must tell me all!

The Woman:

Ah, well,
Since you are so determined. It was thus:
I heard a shout, and saw boys running fast
To the eastern gates. I followed. There he stood,
Your Uliun, and held the lily hand
Of some wild thing he's come upon, they said,
Off in the hills.

Akar:

The dog! I —

The Woman:

Wait awhile:
The worst's to come. A muleteer whispered me
That Uliun had led her through the gates
As naked as an egg! What think you now?

Akar:

The dog! The shameless dog! Oh! let me get
My fingers in her hair, my fingernails
In his false eyes! I'll harry him, the dog!
I'll teach —

The Woman:

I think I hear them. Aye, they come:
Hark to the crowd! They cry, "Disrobe the slut!"

Akar:

Leave her to me! And him! The wastrel hound!

(*The guard, surrounding Uliun and the girl, come down the street, followed by the mob. They halt before the house of Uliun.*)

Uliun:

Disarm, O wife, your heart! I bring —

Akar:

You dog!
Well see I what you bring!

Uliun:

You do not see.
You have not seen, as I have. You mistake
The marvel. You —

Akar:

To bring this open shame
On me, your lawful wife! Straight to my door
To fetch this mountain rat, this brothel pig,
This —

A Voice:

Off wi' the cloak!

Akar:

I'll have it off! Fear not!
I'll strip the —

Uliun:

Akar! Peace, and hear my tale!

Akar:

I want no lies of yours! Have I not seen?
Look at her where she stands and moons, the cow!
Aye, stare, and see what —

Uliun:

Akar, let me speak!

Akar:

Oh, shall I not go mad? He —

Eor:

Let him speak!

Voices:

He'll tell you! . . . Let him speak! . . . A likely tale
He'll have! . . . Disrobe her! . . . Wife, take in the girl:
She'll save you labor-pains! . . . Wife, have you heard
Such tales before? . . . Disrobe her! . . . Let him speak!

Uliun:

O wife! This is no mortal that I bring,
But an immortal. If —

Akar:

O gods of Vae!
There's sweat upon her face, and on her feet
The dust o' the road is black! Behold you, all!
Divinity comes not like that! O gods
Of Vae!

Uliun:

You have not heard her speak.

Egon:

Nor I.

Bid that she speak.

A Voice:

Aye, make her talk!

Voices:

Or dance!

Disrobe her! . . . Let her speak!

Uliun:

She will not speak,
'T is plain, before the crowd. Perchance her tongue
Is alien to them. Yet I heard and knew.
I think that she should speak before the king.

Eor:

Ducorial will not see her now. Meanwhile,
Must I stand guard on her? This is your home.
So take her in.

Uliun:

(*to Akar*) You hear the captain.

Akar:

Nay!

Be off with her. Go hide your beastliness
In some lupanar!

Eor:

Woman, balk us not!

We cannot stand forever at your door.
Let in the two! I've other work.

Uliun:

O wife!
Admit us. I will make all plain to you.
It is not as you fear. She is of God,
This one. Be still, and you shall understand.
Give me an hour of quiet. When you see
The beauty of this being, all your heart
Shall burn with reverence.

Akar:

My heart, say you?
You break it! Get you gone! My little ones
Shall not behold their father's shame. Oh! Where
Go they, the innocents?

(*A little boy and girl peer from behind her.*)

Ah! here you stand!
I'll guard you from her!

(*She lays a hand on the shoulder of each.*)

Uliun:

Dear one, she will share
Your toil for them. They will grow strong and wise
Under such care.

Akar:

He's mad! Away with them!

Uliun:

You cannot know as yet, but let us in
And you shall learn what wonderment is here.
I beg it of you! Trust me for one hour,
And hear my tale in quiet. Many tongues

Disturb you, and the fear of open shame;
But you shall yet be glad you took her in.
Her beauty's other than you deem. One hour,
And I will make you see. I do implore
Your patience yet awhile. Oh! she is not
As you imagine! She will give, not take;
Bring light, not shadow; be serenity,
Not storm. Give her but refuge for an hour
And you shall learn.

Akar:

Nay, shall a harlot cross
My threshold? Is it thus a home endures?
My little ones, behold your traitor sire!
Look! For the last time see him! Yea! those lips
Shall touch your cheeks no more! They are defiled!
And she, his paramour — let her be stoned!

Voices:

Aye, stone her! . . . Stone them both! . . . Tear
off her robe! . . .
Impale them! . . .

Eor:

Hold your tongues, or spears shall prick
Your buttocks! Charge them, guards! Disperse them!

Akar:

Stone
The strumpet!

(*The soldiers charge the crowd, who fly down the street in confusion.*)

Eor:

(*to Uliun*) Said I not you'd bring a storm
Upon us? Where now shall you house the girl?
Your own wife drives you hence. I've scanty time
To waste upon the matter. It is best
That she be sheltered in the jail. To-night
Ducorial shall see her, if he will.

Egon:

I think I can contrive it.

Uliun:

O my wife!
For the last time I beg your patience.

Akar:

Go!
You and your harlot! Show your face no more
To these my innocents, and me your spouse,
Whose heart you trample on before the world!

The soldiers return, form a square about Uliun and the girl, and march away. Akar, with her children at her side, silently watches them depart.

ACT I

SCENE 4

A jail of the city. Three of the jailors, Krood, Vursol and Akora, are at dice.

Vursol:

Why not?

Akora:

I think you are not wise in this.

Krood:

The captain Eor had her.

Vursol:

Why not we?

Akora:

Are you so sure he had her?

Krood:

He was there,
Alone with her.

Akora:

Not long.

Vursol:

But long enough.

Akora:

I am not sure.

Krood:

And when he left her cell
His face was white as frost.

Akora:

I am not sure.
How do we know what blanched it?

Krood:

Well, you know
The tale of how the Dreamer led her in,
Moon-stark. The girl's a wild one, let who will
Be fearful of her.

Akora:

Thus am I.

Vursol:

But wherefore?
The Dreamer is her only friend, and he —

Krood:

He is the Dreamer.

Akora:

Uliun says the king
Must see the girl.

Vursol:

The king? A likely chance!
Ducorial has the palace full of girls.
What is one more to him?

Krood:

Nothing at all.
But much to us.

Vursol:

We'll cast the dice to see
Who first shall visit her?

Akora:

If Eor come?
What then?

Krood:

He'll not return. His guard of her
Ceased at the door.

Akora:

What of the Dreamer?

Krood:

He!
He sits without, and mutters foolishness,
With visage like a widow's. What is he?

Akora:

But Egon?

Vursol:

He is far away. O crow!
I vow you croak for but the sound of it.

Krood:

Think you there sits a queen in yonder cell?
Give me the dice!
(*He casts*) The six and four. It seems
That I am first.

Vursol:

(*casting*) The six and five! Now, crow,
Beat that!

Akora:

(*casting*) The six and three. I am content.

Vursol:

Content? Not I! But wait till I return.

(*He goes to the door of the cell, unlocks it, and enters. . .*)

Akora:

How still it is! They do not even speak.

Krood:

The girl is dumb, they say.

Akora:

But she could scream.

Krood:

Perchance she's willing. She is of the hills,
Where blood is hot.

Akora:

But chaste.

Krood:

You know Vursol:
And still she makes no outcry. It is plain
The girl is willing. Curses on his luck!
Think you he will be long with her?

Akora:

Too long
For him!

Krood:

She must be wanton, to accept
So brief a wooing. Ah! these mountain girls!
I wonder how she looks without her cloak.
I hate this knave Vursol! I'll drink no more
With such a rogue!

Akora:

How still it is!

Krood:

The worse
For me and you! She loves the rascal.

Akora:

Nay —
It is not that, the silence. Let us go
And sit without awhile.

Krood:

I sit without!
Neither of them have seen the last of Krood! . . .
(*Vursol staggers from the cell.*)
What's this? (*rising*)

Akora:

(*rising*) Vursol! What has she done?

Krood:

Vursol!
What chills your blood? Speak to us, comrade!

Akora:

Speak!
What ails the man? Was she not in the cell?
Or what was there to bleach you thus?

Krood:

He stares
As though he's seen a specter.

(*Vursol lurches to a bench, and sits down with his face in his hands.*)

Speak, Vursol!

Akora:

Something has turned him dumb.

Krood:

What have you seen,
Vursol?

Akora:

What troubles you? Speak, comrade!

Krood:

Nay—
He will not speak. Now what's the secret here?
I never knew the man to be like that.
Go you and see what's in the cell, Akora.

Akora:

Not I! It is your turn. The dice have judged
Between us.

Krood:

(*shaking Vursol by the shoulder*)

Tell me, comrade, what's amiss!
How fared you in the cell?

Akora:

He will not speak.
Perhaps he cannot speak.

Krood:

(*again shaking Vursol by the shoulder*)

Vursol! Look up!

(*Vursol gazes at him.*)

The fellow's dazed. So idiots look at one.
What has befallen?

Akora:

Look you in the cell,
If you would know.

Krood:

Look for yourself!

Akora:

Not I!
You are a coward, if you do not look!
The dice have spoken. It may be that bliss
Has struck him pale and dumb.

Krood:

The gods avert
Such joy!

Akora:

Go you and lock the cell.

Krood:

Go you!

Akora:

O timid one! I vow that all the town
Shall know of this! . . . You need not even look
Beyond the doorway.

Krood:

Sit you down, you fool,
And rest your poor, tired tongue! A man would think
I had done murder, you go on so loud.

Akora:

The key is in the lock.

Krood:

Not in the moon?
What news you bring me! Tell me where's my hair.

Akora:

Stiff on your scalp, and turning grey with fear.

Krood:

You liar! For the dice, and not for you,
I lock the door.

(*He goes to the door, begins to close it, glances within and hesitates.*)

Her cloak is off, Akora!

(*Enters the cell, and as suddenly returns.*)

Akora:

What frightens you?

(*Krood staggers toward him.*)

You're pale as poor Vursol.

Krood:

Her eyes! Her eyes!

(*He sits beside Vursol, trembling.*)

Akora:

What is it of her eyes?

Krood:

Her eyes are terrible!

Akora:

I knew.

Krood:

Her eyes
Are terrible!
(*shaking Vursol*) You saw.

Vursol:

I saw.

Akora:

I knew.
This girl is of the everlasting gods.
There is a hush about her. She abides
In patience.

Krood:

Let us put her forth. I fear.

Akora:

I think it well that we should put her forth.

Egon:

(*entering*)
Where is the maid?

Akora:

(*pointing*) In yonder cell.

Egon:

You've left
The door unlocked.

Akora:

We plan to turn her loose.

Egon:

It is too late: the law has heard of her.
She's to be put to trial.

Akora:

And for what?

Egon:

Immodesty.

Akora:

She!

Egon:

First I'd be alone
With her.

Akora:

You'd be alone with her? Alone!
Well, take her. There's the cell. The maid is fair.
Too fair!

Egon:

What maid shall be too fair for me?

He enters the cell. A long silence again ensues. Egon comes out, white-faced, and leaves the jail. Akora, with averted eyes, turns the key in the lock. The three sit close together, staring at the door of the cell.

ACT I

SCENE 5

The court of Hothrundus, a judge. It is late in the afternoon of the same day. A prisoner stands before him. He pronounces sentence.

Hothrundus:

Guilty, as witnessed. Nail him by the tongue
To Laro's threshold. It may be that so
He'll slander men no more.
(*The prisoner is led forth.*) The day grows old.
Who next appears?

A Clerk of the Court:

(*to an attendant*) Bring in the girl who came,
This morning, naked through the gates.

Hothrundus:

Alone?

The Clerk:

Led by one Uliun.

Hothrundus:

The Dreamer?

The Clerk:

Aye.

Hothrundus:

See now what dreaming leads to. He affronts
The state, the law, the king, the very gods,
Who give the robes we wear.

(*The girl, robed, is led in, her eyes downcast.*)

Ha! here's the jade!
Who witnessed this?

The Clerk:

Egon, the Singer, saw,
And Eor, captain of the eastern gates.
Also his men. The many too were there.

Hothrundus:

Their words are but confusion. Where is Egon?

The Clerk:

I have made question. Egon's gone (he said)
To the high mountains, and alone.

Hothrundus:

'T is ill.
He should have stayed. The captain, then?

The Clerk:

Eor
Is stricken dumb. He sits apart and stares
At nothing.

Hothrundus:

Hath she cast a spell on him?
Can this be witchcraft? Girl, lift up thine eyes.

(*She gazes at him.*)

Hast put a spell on him? Nay! Nay! gaze not

At me! There's evil here! Thine eyes are strange!

(*He averts his gaze.*)

Bring Uliun in. This is a deeper thing
Than rumor told me.

The Clerk:

May thy servant speak?

Hothrundus:

Speak.

The Clerk:

Rumor hath it that the Dreamer led
This creature to his domicile, and begged
His wife to take them in.

Hothrundus:

His wife! Indeed
He is well named! His wife! Send for her also.

(*The Dreamer is led in.*)

Give us thy tale of this. Didst lead her in,
And naked? Speak!

Uliun:

The tale is for the king.

Hothrundus:

Thou knave! Dost think Ducorial hath time
To waste upon the story of thy lusts?
Now speak, and tell me where thou found'st the trull.

Uliun:

She is no trull! The girl is of the gods.

Hothrundus:

Defiance such as this aids not thy cause.
Shall I condemn the two of you, unheard?
Where found'st thou her, goddess or harlot? Speak!

Uliun:

Far on the higher mountains.

Hothrundus:

Came she then
Unclad?

Uliun:

Unclad, more beautiful than dreams!

Hothrundus:

What said she?

Uliun:

That is for the king to hear.

Hothrundus:

O fool! to think the king hath time for that!
Didst lead her naked down to Vae?

Uliun:

Wouldst robe
The sun?

Hothrundus:

Shalt thou compare her to the sun?
'T is impious. Didst lead her through the gates
Unrobed?

Uliun:

Unrobed.

Hothrundus:

O deed of shame! And she
Confronted thus the people?

Uliun:

Many came,
But Eor cast a cloak about her form.
Disrobe her. Suffer that thy soul behold
Her beauty: thou shalt worship, as did I.

Hothrundus:

O word of shame! Think'st thou that I would look
On such a sight? I am a decent man.
'T is strange to me she was not stoned! I trust
Few saw. That worthy folk had such offense
Is pain to me. Draw tightlier the robe
About her. Bring the wife of Uliun in. . .
To think a wedded man should so affront
The mother of his children! Nay! the thing's
Unheard of! Bring a strumpet to his home,
A mountain cat, a lean and hungry minx,
And beg his mate to shield her!

(*Akar is brought in. He addresses her.*)

Is yon rogue
Thy husband?

Akar:

Till to-day.

Hothrundus:

He begged thee take
This wench across thy threshold?

Akar:

So he begged.

Hothrundus:

Thou didst refuse?

Akar:

To see his face again
Is dreadful to me.

Hothrundus:

Thou shalt see his back,
And not his face.

Akar:

I beg that I may see
Not even his shadow.

Hothrundus:

Uliun, hark thou me!
For less than thou hast done I'd have thee sacked
With twenty thousand lice. Nay! worse than that!
For it may be that witchcraft enters here.
I am not sure. The girl hath eyes that seem
Not human. It may be thy brain is touched;
So I withhold the farther punishment,
Decreeing thus: Akar shall lash thee forth,
Thee and this wanton, through the gates by which,
Shameless, ye entered.
(*to the attendants*) Bind them wrist to wrist,
And bring a knotted scourge.

Akar:

O noble judge!
My thanks for this!

Hothrundus:

The people's purity
Must be conserved.

(*Uliun and the girl are tied wrist to wrist. A scourge is given to Akar.*)

Lay on them with the lash,
And vehemently. Let the cloak but hide
Her loins. . . Now forth with them!

(*As Akar lifts the scourge, a trumpet is heard without. Her arm falls.*)

Why dost thou pause?
The penalty is given, and is small,
Beside the offense. Lay on the scourge!

(*Soldiers enter.*) Who comes?

The Clerk:

'T is one of the king's captains.

The Captain:

Is it here
That she who entered naked hath her cause
Adjudged?

Hothrundus:

By me, and judgment's given. There
The culprits wait.

The Captain:

Unbind them. They must come
Before Ducorial. The king hath heard
Of this adventure. He is curious. . .
Fall in about them! . . . Forward!

Akar:

(*shrilly*) Curse the king!

ACT II

SCENE I

Evening of the same day. The gardens of Ducorial. He sits in a grove of palm trees, and is fanned by two girl slaves. Evo, a teller of tales, is brought before him, and makes obeisance.

Evo:

O king, live thou forever!

Ducorial:

Like my sire?
And his sire?

Evo:

Live they not among the gods?

Ducorial:

I think if thou mad'st entry to their tombs
Thou'dst find — what thou wouldst find.

Evo:

The mortal part
Remains, indeed; but that which made them kings,
The finer essence, shall it not escape
And mingle with the gods?

Ducorial:

If so, let's hope
It changed upon that journey. Were the gods

To listen, as I, a boy, was forced to hark
My grandsire's tale of how he fought his wars,
Their yawning would shake Heaven. A thousand times
I had to listen, when my heart was set
On play. And now 't is planned I hark to thee,
An even greater liar. Well, proceed.

Evo:

O king, live thou forever! . . . 'T is the tale
Of Odath. She was daughter of a king
Beyond the western mountains. She was fair,
And like a —
(*An attendant enters, and kneels before Ducorial.*)

Ducorial:

Speak!

The Attendant:

The girl is come, of whom
Asmartas told thee.

Ducorial:

Bring her here.
(*to the teller of tales*) Thou hast
Permission to depart. (*Exit the teller of tales.*)
How shall I know
His tales are not as true as any news
That's brought me? Tales of this world and the next —
I know they're what is hoped I shall believe.
What difference, if I heard the truth? No doubt
The lies are merrier. What I was taught
In boyhood — well, I had small joy of that,
And something to unlearn. Could I but trust

One faithful soul, it might be —
(*Uliun and the girl are led in.*) Here, at least,
We've some diversion.
(*to an attendant*) Who's the man?

Attendant:

'T is said
His name is Uliun, called the Dreamer.

Ducorial:

Well,
I'd have his latest dream. O Uliun, speak,
And tell me what they do up in the moon!

Uliun:

I have no part in sorcery.

Ducorial:

This girl —
Whence came she?

Uliun:

That I know not; but I think
That she is of the gods.

Ducorial:

The gods again!
Give me the girls of earth! Where found'st thou her?

Uliun:

Far on the eastern mountains.

Ducorial:

And didst lead
Her, naked, through my gates?

Uliun:

Not otherwise
Should men behold her beauty.

Ducorial:

Wherefore cloak
The girl so closely now?

Uliun:

The law exacts
Concealment of her glory.

Ducorial:

Ah, the law?
Well, there are laws for even me, I find.

Uliun:

But suffer that I take away the robe,
That thou behold, and worship.

Ducorial:

In good time.
First tell of how thou cam'st to her.

Uliun:

She came
To me.

Ducorial:

Tell of it, with no more ado.
Tell the whole tale, and freely, fearing naught.

Uliun:

It was upon the everlasting hills.
I wandered, waiting for a certain sign.

The night and north and heavens were vast and cold,
And four great stars, the captains of the host
That held the western watch, crossed swords and sank.
I felt the night's infinity. I felt
A sense that mighty lips had called my name,
Far beyond circumstance and Time. I heard
The sound of trumpets tremble on the dark.
Then silence, deeper than the skies'. And then —
A silver singing, clear and far away! . . .
It died. . . The austere surveillance of the stars
Seemed colder on my soul. . . Slow came the time
Of night and day at parley. . . Shadows fell. . .
No moon arose, but eastward broke such dawn
As when the moon and morning blend their light,
Spectral and bleak. . . There came a voiceless wind.
It was a thin, a chill, a silvern air.
The dews were white with day. Awhile I dreamt
Of beauty set beyond me save in dream.
I turned, and it was standing at my side! . . .

Ducorial:

You mean 't was she?

Uliun:

This one. She gazed on me.
Her eyes are more than starlight.

Ducorial:

Yea! What then?

Uliun:

A step. Her hands were on my breast!

Ducorial:

And then?

Uliun:

Then full upon my lips the immortal kiss!

Ducorial:

And then?

Uliun:

She spoke.

Ducorial:

What spake she of?

Uliun:

Aye, what?
How little of her mighty whisperings
May I translate! How tell her mysteries?
A gleam, an echo, far and faint, as now. . .
Beg that she speak to thee as then to me.

Ducorial:

Some things are best unsaid. What spake she of?

Uliun:

God's silence, and the world's enormous pain,
Forevermore unbroken.

Ducorial:

What care I
For those? The girl is better dumb, except
She tell me softer secrets! She is fair.

Uliun:

She is, of all things felt or heard or seen,
The loveliest and strangest. Thou shalt dream
Of all the beauty ever night or day
Made known to thee, then, gazing on her face,
Shalt find the marvel of it all.

Ducorial:

Her eyes?
Why are her eyes downcast?

Uliun:

I know not why.

Ducorial:

After she spoke, what then?

Uliun:

I do not know
If for an instant or an age I heard
The mystery of that music. At its end,
She took my hand in hers, and so we fared
To Vae.

Ducorial:

How came ye down so swift? 'T is told
Ye entered in with morning at the gates.

Uliun:

I know not, feeling but her hand in mine
And conscious of her grace and goddesshood.
Her feet upon the granite made no sound.
Yet hath she water's gift, and moves not save
To music.

Ducorial:

At the last she comes to me,
As all things come. Go now.
(*to an attendant*) Lead him away,
And house him in the northern tower.

Uliun:

King,
Comes she not with me?

(*She turns to Uliun. They start to go.*)

Ducorial:

She abides with me.
Beautiful, silvern stranger, pause awhile.

Uliun:

Beware how thou dost use her!

Ducorial:

Shall a slave
Caution a king?

Uliun:

I am no slave, who bear
Her kiss that made me royal. I but warn,
Knowing that she is of the gods.

Ducorial:

The gods?
That is for her to prove.

Uliun:

Again, beware!
Her spirit and her flesh are not of Time!
Voices defend her, and a wind of Wings!

She comes not to us as the others come.
Shall she sing songs for thee, or dance a dance?
Be consort of thy jester, or thy leman?
Beware, for she hath Immortality
As guard forever!

Ducorial:

(*angrily*) Off with him!

Uliun:

(*to the girl*) Farewell,
Thou benediction of my gaze! Farewell!
(*He is led away.*)

Ducorial:

(*to the girl*)
Wouldst rather stay with me?
(*She remains silent, with eyes downcast.*)
Forbear to sulk!
I know a sweeter way to part those lips
Than speech! Thou knowest what I mean? Still dumb?
At morning thou wert keen enough to kiss.
Lead her to Voal, and bid that she be laved
In perfumes. (*The girl is led away.*)
Bid the youngest harpers come.
Aha! these dreamers! They would better seek
The herb sardonion, to make men laugh.
As for our friend who warned me, he shall know
The solemn gaze of lions, ere they feast!
(*The harpers come in. One sings.*)

(*Song*)

ATTHAN DANCES

The silver of the lyre
  Cries, and thy silver feet
  Like living flowers repeat
Thy body's silver fire.

What scents without a name
  Within thy tresses hide?
  What perfect roses died
To give thy mouth its flame?

Thy hands, uplifting, float
  More delicate than Love's.
  Thy breasts are two white doves
Whose moan is in thy throat.

As lyre and cithern swoon,
  Thou lingerest, in thy pace
  The panther's gift of grace,
Who glides below the moon.

O linger where I sigh
  Above the golden wine,
  And touch thy mouth to mine —
A scarlet butterfly.

ACT II

SCENE 2

Noon of the next day. The interior of the temple of the god Korkamedum. Arkonion, the high-priest, stands before the huge statue of the god.

Arkonion:

(*solil.*)
Tho thou be stone, is not their one God stone?
Yea! tho the armies of the north come down
And overthrow thee, shall their temple house
A kindlier than thou? Thine altar-stone
Bears the same blood as theirs. Thy temple-gloom
Gives the same answer unto the same prayer —
A silence. Is it well the gods should speak?
But if a man, as I, speak in thy name,
Shall not the people prosper, and thy house?
By thee our fathers rose; by thee their sons
Abide a little, ere new nations carve
New cities from the old basalt. But Life,
Victim of an unalterable rite,
Forever bleeds. Tho priest and god are dead
At long-forsaken altars: she endures.
Fair is the mask a moment, and the lie.

(*Enter Horeth, a priest.*)

Arkonion:

What now?

Horeth:

The king is dead!

Arkonion:

Ducorial!
Who slew him?

Horeth:

'T was by sorcery he died.

Arkonion:

By whose?

Horeth:

The king, for passion deaf and blind,
Took to his bed a witch.

Arkonion:

Dost mean the girl
That Uliun brought in?

Horeth:

Aye, she.

Arkonion:

A witch!
We might have known. The Dreamer, where is he?

Horeth:

Locked in the northern tower. Ducorial
Condemned him to the lions.

Arkonion:

To the beasts?
Nay! He shall die more slowly! It is he
Who brought this doom upon the king.

Horeth:

'T was he.

Arkonion:

How slew she him?

Horeth:

It is not surely known.

Arkonion:

There was no mark upon him?

Horeth:

None. She stood
Like marble in the morning, at her feet
The robe that cloaked her. At her feet the king
Lay white as she. None dared to handle her
Nor meet her gaze, until the aged Voal,
Who fears not even the dead, came silently
And led her to the crypt, and chained her there.

Arkonion:

And now I rule, until the princes choose
Another monarch. Send the trumpets forth.
Bid that the priesthood gather. I must go
And see this doom, and her who compassed it.

(*Exit Horeth.*)

'T is strange! The king was strong, and not yet old.
But sorcery — what mail is proof against it?
Dead at her feet! A girl! Now is she girl,
Or demon? It is rumored she is dumb,
But fire, with many tongues, may give her one
That's loud enough; for torment brings the truth.
I should have known that she was more than maid,
To enter Vae unrobed. The thing is dark,
But flame shall light it. Uliun must die. . .
And she? It may be better if she live
A vassal to Korkamedum the god.

ACT II

SCENE 3

The same place, at midnight, a week afterward. The priests of Korkamedum are ranged, seated, in a semi-circle at his feet, Arkonion midway. Before them stand Uliun and the girl. She is still robed.

Arkonion:

Brothers, and servants of Korkamedum!
The king is dead, and, lapped in purest gold,
Lies with his fathers. She that slew the king
Confronts you now, and he that led her down
To Vae, the mightily bereft. To-night
We sit in judgment. Uliun, thou sayest
She spoke to thee: why speaks she not to me?
For I have questioned her; but she persists
In silence.

Uliun:

It may be she knows what use
You destine for her utterance.

Arkonion:

Beware!
Thine own is sacrilege, I being priest
Of high Korkamedum. Again I ask:
Why speaks she not?

Uliun:

It may be that she knows
Her speech is dark to thee.

Arkonion:

And wherefore dark?
Am I not revelation of the will
Of this Korkamedum? If a god speak
Through me, shall not a mortal?

Uliun:

Nay, she stands
Immortal.

Arkonion:

That shall soon be put to proof.
A bed is laid for her. . . Once more I ask:
Why speaks she not to me?

Uliun:

Perchance she wills
That I be spokesman for her.

Arkonion:

What! A low
And needy thing like thee! What god hath told
His tidings through thy lips?

Uliun:

A greater one
Than speaks through thine.

Arkonion:

More blasphemy! The fire
Shall purge thee of this dross. Bid thou the witch
To tell us in what way she slew the king.

Uliun:

It is not meet that I should question her.

Arkonion:

Then will I question. Girl, declare to us
Why and whereby the king was slain.

(*She is silent.*) You see:
She will not speak. . . The time is near at hand
When thou shall speak, thou witch!

(*to Horeth*) Lead her away
And have her spread upon the coals, until
She tells what we would know.

(*She is led away.*) Thou Uliun!
Declare now all she told thee!

Uliun:

To what end?
That thou deride the Message, or pervert
Its true intent? It is not to thy kind
That she hath come with morning on her brow
And light upon her lips. I dreamt the king
Might see and hear, but he had other use
For her divinity, who hoped to make
A puppet of her. Truly —

Arkonion:

I demand
That thou declare the thing she told!

Uliun:

To thee?
Nay! not to thee nor any of thy kind!

Not for such darkness came the holy Truth.
I go before the people.

Arkonion:

Thou shalt go!
Be sure of that!

Uliun:

I shall speak out to them.

Arkonion:

And from a lifted place!

Uliun:

They shall draw near
And harken.

Arkonion:

They shall harken!

Uliun:

Unto me.

Arkonion:

Yea! unto thee! But what the crowd shall hear —
That is another matter.
(*An executioner enters.*)
Ha! the witch
Hath spoken!
(*to executioner*)
Wherefore comest thou?

Executioner:

To know
What further we're to do.

Arkonion:

Horeth the priest
Hath knowledge of our will.

Executioner:

Horeth the priest
Squats gibbering by the coals, and plays with them.

Arkonion:

Thou sayest — ! Horeth! Came the witch with him?
What did ye?

Executioner:

Very meekly did she come.
We stripped her. Horeth whimpered in the gaze
Of her great eyes. Nathless we held the girl
Upon the fire. She will not burn at all.
She moves not, nor complains. We would have drawn
Horeth away, but 't is forbidden us
To touch a priest. Now what's to do?

Arkonion:

Return,
And bring the girl before us.

(*Exit executioner.*) Said I not
That there is sorcery here? She will not burn!
There will be other ways.

(*to Heral, a priest*) Heral, go forth

And hasten to the leech with Horeth. Hold
Thine eyes averted from the witch.

(*Exit Heral.*) The thing
Grows blacker. She and thou shall pay for this,
O Dreamer!

Uliun:

To the one that knew her kiss
There stands no punishment.

Arkonion:

Thy flesh shall feel
Other caressments!

(*The girl is led in, naked. The priests rise from their seats.*) Wherefore lead her thus
Before me? Said I not—

Executioner:

The cloak was burned.
It lay too near the fire.

A Young Priest:

Her loveliness
Is not of earth!

Arkonion:

Yea, not of earth, but Hell!
Get to thy cell!

(*The young priest departs.*)

Cast down your eyes, and sit.

(*He throws his robe around the girl.*)

I wonder that the god moves not the earth
To swallow you! Such shame hath never been
Before him until now!

(*to executioner*) See that no word
Of this go forth to men. Depart!

(*Exit executioner.*) This witch
Hath brought confusion to Korkamedum
And death to great Ducorial himself!
Fire is her vassal. Demons bend the knee
To her. O Uliun, for the last time
I conjure thee to tell what word she said
Upon the mountains!

Uliun:

Not to thee, O priest!
But to the people is the Message come.
Stand with them, if thine ears would hear.

Arkonion:

Thy heart
Is mindful of my promise. Thou shalt speak,
Indeed, and they shall hearken thee. 'T is true.
So have I sworn. To-morrow, at high noon,
Thou shalt invoke them, and make plain the Word
She gave thee. As I say, so shall it be.
I say the thing before the dreadful face
Of high Korkamedum. The vow is sworn.
Thou shalt invoke them from a lifted place!

ACT II

SCENE 4

Noon of the next day. The western confines of Vae, a huge cliff rising steeply from the river Uval. Uliun, on a high cross, faces the people, who are held back by lines of soldiery in armor. At his feet stand the lords and priests of Vae, surrounding Arkonion and the girl.

Arkonion:

O Dreamer, said I not thou shouldst invoke
The people from a lifted place? Behold!
They wait thy word!

Uliun:

(*to the crowd*) O brothers! at this hour —

The People:

False prophet! . . . Murderer! . . . Burn him! . . .
Tear him down! . . .
Fire to the sorcerer! . . . Burn the dog! . . .

Uliun:

O friends!
A little —

The People:

Tear him down! . . . Give us the dog! . . .
Stone the false prophet! . . .

Uliun:

O my fellow men!
I beg you —

The People:

Burn him where he hangs! . . . Bring
fire! . . .
Justice! . . . He slew Ducorial! . . . Give us now
The sorcerer! . . .

Arkonion:

(*to Uliun*) Why dost thou not reveal
Thy Message? See — they wait. Their ears alone
Thou deemest worthy of thy words. Speak out!
They wait thy joyful tidings.

Uliun:

O my friends!
The one God —

The People:

Rip his tongue out! . . . Tear him
down! . . .
Burn the false prophet! . . .

Uliun:

O my fellow men!
The one God —

The People:

He blasphemes the gods! . . . Bring
fire! . . .
Fire for the sorcerer! . . .

Arkonion:

(*to Uliun*) Give utterance
From thine high place! The people wait thy word —
The gentle ones that hunger for thy truth!
Invoke the fragrant many! See — they wait!

Uliun:

They will not hear me.

Arkonion:

Is thy folly plain,
Or not? Thou knowest now they will not hark.
It had been wiser to confide thy truth
To me and not to them. 'T is not too late:
Tell all to me, and thou shalt be forgiven,
Thine injury soothed, thy freedom pledged — aye, more:
Thou shalt be of the priesthood, and my peer,
If thou reveal her mystery, and cause
That the witch tell her secret.

Uliun:

Not to thee
Nor to thy kind, that surely would pervert
The music of that Message!

Arkonion:

Then 't is lost —
She and her tidings! For the witch shall die,
Hurled from this height.

Uliun:

The girl is of the gods —
Of the true God — and cannot ever die.

Arkonion:

That shall be seen. At least *thou* diest!

Uliun:

I?
This changing memory clasped by night? O priest!
What if I die?

Arkonion:

Thou diest painfully.
Three days men sometimes live upon the cross.

Uliun:

Even three days will end, and all will be
As it had never been.

Arkonion:

But I shall live
Beyond this life, and see thy soul in Hell.
'T is so attested in my faith.

Uliun:

Thy faith!
The song of shadows to a vanished god!

Arkonion:

Shall the gnat question, or the moth repine?
The gods endure. This witch whose dupe thou art
Shall pass with thee to torments.

Uliun:

Harm her not!
She hath sown thunders in my soul. These lips
Burn with her lightnings.

Arkonion:

And thine end is this!
A sorry close!

Uliun:

I am unworthy her.
It well may be that I have wrought not well.
Ever strange voices call me, and I go
On roads of dream austere and desolate.
But she shall live, haunting a peaceless world,
With all a world's wild beauty in her face,
And all a star's irradiance in her soul.
She is immortal.

Arkonion:

Immortality
Is of the soul.

Uliun:

And Beauty of the soul.
For Beauty is of good, howe'er she hide
Her face with Evil's mask awhile. My death
Is near, but I have served her in my life,
And tho men say I have not served her well,
I shall not know, or knowing, shall not care,
Who am but shadow of her starriness.

Arkonion:

And to what end?

Uliun:

There is no end. Her light
Shall be on other heavens. To have seen
Suffices.

Arkonion:

She is Beauty, then?

Uliun:

The heart
Of Beauty, which is Truth.

Arkonion:

What is her word?

Uliun:

Her word is of man's pain. I will not say
The whole, lest thou pervert it. She will speak
Through greater lips than mine.

Arkonion:

She will not speak
To me, and therefore shall not speak. Her death
Is on her.

The People:

Burn the sorceress! . . . Stone the witch! . . .
Bray the abomination! . . .

Arkonion:

(*to Uliun*) How they love
Thy beauty which is truth!

Uliun:

The day will come
When they shall love her.

Arkonion:

No! her day *has* come,
And goes, forever! Turn the cross, that he
May watch its going!

(*The cross is turned to face westward.*)

Bring her to the verge.

(*Two soldiers lead the girl to the edge of the precipice.*)

Disrobe her.

(*They take away the cloak.*)

Let the people see her shame.

The People:

Give us the jade! . . . Give us the shining witch! . . .

Arkonion:

Behold, O Uliun! for the last time,
The sorceress that duped thee! If the fire
Was her ally, the rocks that wait below
Shall soon be mine.

The People:

Give us the witch! . . . Grant not
So swift an end! . . . Torment her! . . . Burn the
trull! . . .
Impale her! . . . Let the sorceress know the stake! . . .
Bring fire! . . .

Arkonion:

(*to Uliun*) See what thy truth and beauty mean
To them! And thou wilt die for such?

Uliun:

She lives.

And what am I?

Arkonion:

She goes.

Uliun:

She shall return.

Arkonion:

Her beauty is but fleeting foam.

Uliun:

Aye, foam,
But foam of an eternal sea. The Wind
Is on the Wave forever. Let thy gaze
Be mine a moment, thou immortal Truth!
(*She looks across to Uliun.* . .)
Farewell, thou beauty that I knew awhile!
The shadows meet. The sound and dust of Time
Pass like an evil dream. Farewell!
(*His head sinks.*)

Arkonion:

Hurl forth
The witch!

The People:

Torment her! . . . Let her know the stake! . . .

She is thrown from the cliff.

ACT II

SCENE 5

The green hills beyond the river Uval. Egon, and Lel, a shepherd-boy, sit in the late forenoon beneath the shade of an oak, and look across to the city Vae.

Lel:

(*singing*)

The green snake hides in the tortoise shell,
And the spider sleeps in the toadstool bell.

Egon:

Why do you always sing that foolish song?
It wearies me.

Lel:

'T is not a foolish song!
Give me a better.

Egon:

Here's a ballad, then.

(*Song*)

THE RUNE

Nain the prince, one day in youth,
  Playing on the northern dune,
Found an Arctic dragon-tooth,
  Whiter than the April moon.

Keen and cold and bright it lay,
  Where a long-forgotten keel
Crumbled gauntly, day by day,
  And the gull and curlew wheel.

Nain, enraptured with the thing,
  Quick and eager, like a bird,
Brought it to the drunken king —
  Hoping for a thankful word.

Called the king for Amelup,
  Graver of the gem and gold;
Bade him make of it a cup,
  Ere the budding month grew old.

Ere the given time ran out,
  Amelup in ruby flame
Girt the ivory about
  With a long-unuttered name.

Amelup, before the king
  Learned what weird lay gleaming there,
Found by night a faery ring;
  Faded in that magic air.

Now the king will never have
  Knowledge of the glowing rune,
Tho the witch in crypt and cave
  Beg her dæmon to commune.

Never may the king divine,
  Tho a youth and maid he kill, —
Tho he drink a holy wine
  To the elf within the hill.

Amelup may laugh right well,
If he hear that angry lord
Beg the magic men to tell
What no magic may accord.

Lel:

'T is longer, but not better.

Egon:

Well, at least,
No serpent hisses there.

Lel:

What do you mean?

Egon:

You would be long in finding what I mean.

Lel:

Anyhow, you've a dragon there. I hope
To see one — but not near! Think you they hide
Among our hills?

Egon:

'T is certain. If one came,
What would you do with him?

Lel:

I do with *him*!
The trouble is, what would he do with me!

Egon:

You are so small a mouthful, it is like
He'd pass you by, and seize a lamb.

Lel:

Ah! now
You're making fun of me! Tell me the truth:
What would he do?

Egon:

Teach you your prayers.

Lel:

Now
I know you're making fun of me! Go on:
I care not much. One thing I love in you:
You never scold nor teach. You must be bad.
But then, I like it.

Egon:

But if I am worse
Than you suppose?

Lel:

At least you're good to *me*.
Lend me your flute of willow.

Egon:

Can you play?

Lel:

No; but I thought you'd teach me.

Egon:

(*laughing*) Only now
You said you like me since I do not teach.

Lel:

Oh! whistling's different. 'T is happiness.
But tell me: are there fauns?

Egon:

Why, you are one.

Lel:

Ah, no! I mean a real one.

Egon:

A nymph
Would suit me better.

Lel:

I should love a faun,
A little one, for playmate. On the hills
I'm often lonesome.

Egon:

Well, you've me.

Lel:

What, you?
You are too old.

Egon:

Do I then seem so old?

Lel:

No. . . 'T is not that. But you are different.
You say so many things I do not know.
Often I think you're fooling me.

Egon:

Some day,
If you remember, you will know I said
Sad things, but true. You're happy now: forget
My nonsense. Look! Far off along her cliffs
Vae gathers.

Lel:

Yes; there is a mighty crowd
Of folk. Is it a holiday?

Egon:

I think
It is no holiday. The soldiery
Are there: I know them by their glittering helms.
Also the priests: their scarlet robes betray
Their presence.

Lel:

All the city's out. I long
To visit Vae.

Egon:

You are much better here,
Tending your sheep. Vae is no place for you.

Lel:

They've sugared figs in Vae.

Egon:

And sugared girls,
Whose lips at last are bitter. Stay you here,
And hunt your brother faun.

Lel:

'T is very sure
I shall stay here; and it is far from sure
I'll find a faun to play with.

Egon:

You've your sheep.

Lel:

I hate them! Why, who doesn't loathe the sheep,
That has the care of them? Indeed, I wish
That dragons lived on sheep. Then all the —

Egon:

Look!
They're lifting up a cross upon the cliff. . .
One hangs upon it.

Lel:

What's all that about?
Some sport of theirs? Do city people play?

Egon:

Not as you play.

Lel:

A man upon the cross!
And is it fun for him?

Egon:

You —! Trouble not
Your curly head!

Lel:

I never knew before
There were so many folk. Like ants they are!

Egon:

And yet unlike.

Lel:

Think you that one will yet
Fall from the cliff. That were a pity. Still,
It were a noble sight. I wish that Vae

Were not so far. 'T is hard to see the sport,
And one hears naught at all.

Egon:

It is as well;
Some day you'll hear more than is good for you.

Lel:

Ha! tell me now!

Egon:

Not I. The years will tell.
O youth upon the hills! O lyric heart!
O rain beyond the horizon!

Lel:

What is that
You're saying?

Egon:

You shall know it soon enough,
Dear boy!

Lel:

Why do the people wave their arms?

Egon:

Time grant they never wave their arms at you,
In hate, or love that turns to hate so soon!

Lel:

They wave their arms. If it were not so far
I think that I could hear them. Are you sure
There is a man upon the cross? I see
None there.

Egon:

Yet one is there.

Lel:

How stays he on
The cross? Has he a rope? The cross is high.
Think you he will fall down from it? That were
A pity. Still, a noble sight. How stays
He on the cross?

Egon:

Be silent!

Lel:

Can't I ask
A question? Hum! Be testy as you please!
Plenty of other folk will talk with me.
My dog is better company! Here, Kak!
Come hither, Kak! The sheep do well enough.

(*Sings*)

The green snake hides in the tortoise shell,
And the spider sleeps in the toadstool bell.
The green snake hides in the tortoise shell —

Egon:

Will you have done with singing that!

Lel:

Then say
What all that sport's about.

Egon:

I do not know.
And if I did I am not sure I'd tell. . .

See how the soldiers make a crescent moon
Of steel!

Lel:

I think if it were not for them
That many would be crowded to the edge
And fall upon the river rocks — a sight
To beat a battle between wolf and dogs!
Look now! I see you look. More soldiers stand
About the cross. Their caps are little stars.
What do they now?

Egon:

They labor at the cross.
Ha! See! they turn it! Do you not discern
That there's a man upon it?

Lel:

Aye! 'T is plain
That one hangs there. He is so white! Has he
No robe to cover him?

Egon:

He has no robe.
Be off with you! Here comes your dusty flock.

Lel:

I will not go. . . The kid, with vibrant tail,
Nudges the bloated udder. They would feed,
And I would watch the playful folk of Vae. . .
A funny sport! Look! Look! The soldiers lead
Another to the granite's edge! . . . He gleams
Like water in the moonlight!

Egon:

'T is no man!
It is that heavenly One the Dreamer led
By morning from the mountains! Then 't is he
That hangs upon the cross! O world of beasts!
What do ye?

Lel:

Tell me what they do.

Egon:

Alas!
They do eternal sacrilege! O clouds!
Ye breath of gods upon the heavens' glass,
Far foaming up the cold northwestern sky!
Hold ye no lightnings to prevent this deed?
O granite cliffs, more tender than their hearts!
Shall not ye quiver with the crime, and fall?

Lel:

(*weeping*)
What is it that they do?

Egon:

They do not know!
So has it been forever. Ah! ye men
Who do not see the goddess when she comes!
Who crucify the Dreamer and his Dream!
Who glory in the midnight of your lust!
O heart of man! Shalt thou be never changed?
Is Evil everlasting, and her Night?
I do not know. A voice cries out in me:
"The Dream is evil, and the Dream endures!"

O children of the Darkness, still ye kneel
In prayer to the Ghost of what was not,
Nor is, nor shall be ever, then arise
And heap with torment fellow-man and brute!
O Death! the annihilation of thy cup
Is not too dreadful. Still I hear that Voice:
"The Dream is evil, and the Dream endures!"

Lel:

Why do you cry so loudly? Ha! last night
I dreamt of honey! It was in a tree,
And no bees there to guard it. As I reached
To choose a comb —

Egon:

Ah gods! They've cast her!

Lel:

Look!
The white one falls like silver from the cliff!
She strikes the rock. I see her lying there.
Why do you hold your hands before your face?

ACT III

SCENE 1

Twilight of the same day. Ogu, jester to the dead king, sits with Velanna, a dancing-girl, in the garden of the palace.

Ogu:

(*singing*)

Sounds of war are in my ears:
Ready, women, with your tears!
Bloody was the sunset. Mars
Rides the Bull among the stars.
Let Orion's sword be drawn,
That he sheath it in the dawn!
Let the bow-strings of the East
Call the vultures to the feast!
Let the arrows of the North
Sing to —

Velanna:

Ogu, a plague upon your silly songs!
Let me have peace a little.

Ogu:

It is war
That comes.

Velanna:

Then I am glad that I've no lover.

Ogu:

Take *me*: I am a man of peace.

Velanna:

Take *you*!
Now that's a better jest than you have made
In seven years! Take *you*! I think I know
A wiser plan: go mingle with the force
That threatens us, and gabble all your jokes,
That when they slumber, as they shortly must,
Our army may attack them by surprise.

Ogu:

You think, no doubt, you're witty. Woman's tongue
Is hinged on trifles.

Velanna:

Like a jester's brain.
But then, we make our living otherwise.

Ogu:

Ha! "otherwise" is true! For instance, legs.

Velanna:

What quarrel have you with my legs?

Ogu:

Who? I?
A quarrel with your legs? It is my grief
I see not more of them, my girl.

Velanna:

I think
That there you hide a jest. Is no one safe
From your deridings? They are honest legs.

Ogu:

And capable: they've carried you as far
As a king's garden. Farther still, perhaps,
For all I know.

Velanna:

Ah, yes! No doubt you think
You're witty. 'T is as well Ducorial died
Of sorcery, not yawned himself to death
Over your mouldy jests.

Ogu:

Enough! Enough!
Have the last word! But now I'm wondering
What prince they'll choose to be the coming king.

Velanna:

Whome'er they choose, it must be well for you.

Ogu:

And why?

Velanna:

He'll not have known your mildewed wit,
Or having known, will have forgotten. So
You'll have it all to drag forth and repeat,
Sparing your jaded brain.

Ogu:

Girl, cried I not
"Enough?" Have done! Be not implacable!
Go use your legs in any way you think
Most profitable!

Velanna:

(*rising*) If I must do that,
I'll have them take me from you.

Ogu:

Not so swift!
Tarry, and tell me what you saw to-day
Of old Arkonion's pageant.

Velanna:

Saw you not?
I thought no man was absent from it. Nay!
I am forgetful: you are not a man.

Ogu:

That's something which you dare not put to proof.

Velanna:

Nor care to. . . Well, 't is strange you were not there.

Ogu:

Alas! the eunuch Voal set eyes on me,
When I would pass him with a flagon raped
From the king's chamber. In his agéd spite,
He locked me in my own, and set me free
When all was over. May his rheum increase,
Till he go blind!

Velanna:

(*laughing*) I warrant 't is the one
And only draught that you have missed since birth.
Ah, sacrilege! to set apart by force
A jester and his drink!

Ogu:

Have done with this!
What of the carnival?

Velanna:

It was no sport
For Uliun. They thought him dead, but when
The guard was gone, the people made a fire
About the cross. Ha! he had life enough
When the flames rose!

Ogu:

And I not there to see!
Tetter and gout to Voal! How fared the witch?

Velanna:

They cast her from the cliff.

Ogu:

Too swift a doom!
She also should have burned.

Velanna:

'T is thought the priests
Wanted her hid from sight as speedily
As well could be. No man could meet her gaze
And go from her unchanged.

Ogu:

I was not here
When she bewitched Ducorial. Had I seen,
I —

Velanna:

Had you seen, you might not think the world
So gay a spot.

Ogu:

She spoke not, it is said.

Velanna:

She needed not to speak. Her eyes declared
More than her tongue.

Ogu:

Now fishes eat her eyes
And nibble at that tongue.

Velanna:

Not yet: she fell
Fair on a rock that Uval foams around.
Nor man nor fish may reach her.

Ogu:

Let her lie
And rot! The fishes or the worms — care we
Which feast on her? Still, 't was too swift a doom.

Velanna:

You should have been no jester, but a judge.
Yet are you judge of when a capon's cooked
And wine of ancient vintage.

Ogu:

And of legs.

Velanna:

I will not stay to have derision cast
Upon my art. You're envious of the praise
My limbs elicit from the court.

Ogu:

Not I!
But I am envious of the one for whom
You dance alone, and with no misting veils.

Velanna:

As if I ever dreamed of such a thing!
I hope you dance yourself, and from a noose. (*Exit.*)

Ogu:

There is no pleasing them. Deny they're fair,
And they are at you like so many wasps.
Affirm they're beautiful, and they aver
Your insincerity or fell designs.
I think the Turk knows best their management,
Or they beyond the Oxus. Well, at least,
I am not wed to one, and so my sleep
Is that of the just man; and if my ears
Should hanker after nonsense, I can talk
To my dear self. A murrain to the sex!
They know not what they want, but know too well
That they are wanted. I'm a fool by trade,
But wise enough at heart to know that each,
In secret, deems her mate a fool. Why not?
She gets it every time he answers her,
And every time he thinks he cozens her,
And every time he crosses her advice.

I am for keeping clear of them. There's joy
In wisdom only, and I was a sage
In choosing the profession of a fool.
I'm so in seeming, while the man that weds
Is so in deed. . . I smell a savory smell.
'Will go and tell the cook how fair she is! (*Exit.*)

ACT III

SCENE 2

Dawn of the next day. The eastern gates of Vae, still unopened. Warriors watch from the rampart above the gate.

Ortan:

(*a warrior, to his friend Arlo*)
Think you Corvannon will attack?

Arlo:

'T is said.

Ortan:

'T will be the siege, then. Vae is far too weak
To fight them on the mountains or the plain.

Arlo:

Too weak unless Korkamedum exalt
Our legionry.

Ortan:

The North is strong, and hath
Gods of her own.

Arlo:

Is it a war of gods
Or men?

Ortan:

At least, the men will do the dying.

Arlo:

There's truth, and truth to spare!

Ortan:

'T is most unjust
That we, who may be fly-blown in a week,
Should have so little pay for so much risk.
It would not matter, were not wine so dear.

Arlo:

And girls so coy.

Ortan:

And life so dull.

Arlo:

'T is true;
Tho yesterday was frolicsome enough.

Ortan:

While the sport lasted; and we missed the half.

Arlo:

How so?

Ortan:

Have not you heard that, when we left,
The people lit a fire about the cross,
And found the Dreamer still alive?

Arlo:

Ah, Gods!
They've all the fun, and we must fight for them!
'T is most unfair!

Ortan:

Unjust! Unbearable!

Arlo:

I doubt not Uliun made noise enough.

Ortan:

He cried not out, they say, but shook his perch
Right soundly.

Arlo:

And he lasted until night,
I warrant.

Ortan:

That I do not know. The smoke
May well have ended him ere set of sun.

Arlo:

Which were a pity.

Ortan:

I will wager much
That he repented that he led her down
To Vae.

Arlo:

As I repent we let them in,
For Eor sits bewitched.

Ortan:

And Egon's gone,
Who sang for us so ticklish songs.

Arlo:

And dead
Is great Ducorial.

Ortan:

The princes chose,
Last night, another king to govern us,
But who, it is not certain.

Arlo:

This or that,
At any rate we'll fight his wars.

Ortan:

And die
With half one's life unlived, and all one's thirst
Unquenched. Once more I say that life is dull,
And most unjust.

Enelus:

(*captain of the guard*)

Align! . . . Descend! . . .

(*The warriors go down from the wall and stand before the gate.*)

Align! . . .

(*to the old man*)

Open the gates!

(*The gates are pushed slowly outward. The Girl is revealed, standing beneath the overhanging rampart.*)

Ye gods of Vae! 'T is she
Whom yesterday we thought we slew! (*He kneels.*)

The Soldiers:

(*kneeling*) 'T is she! . . .
Down on your knees! . . . Oh! spare us! . . . She returns! . . .
The Girl is of the gods! . . . She knows not death! . . .
'T is she! . . . Oh! spare us! . . .

Enelus:

Goddess, visit not
On us thy vengeance! We but serve: the priests,
Not we, wrought desecration. Spare thy slaves!
Command me! Speak thy will!

(*She stands silent, gazing beyond them.*)

Arlo:

She slays us not.

Ortan:

Perchance she seeks another.

Enelus:

Silent, ye!

(*to the Girl*)
Speak! for thine eyes are terrible! Command,
And I shall serve thee! Wouldst thou see the king?

(*She is silent.*)
The high-priest?

(*She is silent.*) Nay! be merciful! Thine eyes
Arraign me! 'T was not I who cast thee forth.
Again I beg, command!

(*She remains silent.*) Alas! her gaze
Is on the gods! She shall bring doom on us,
Except we win forgiveness.

(*The folk of Vae begin to gather, falling to their knees as they behold.*)

A Voice from the Crowd:

It is she!

Another Voice:

The girl is of the gods!

A third Voice:

Yea! We have sinned!

A fourth Voice:

We have done sacrilege before the gods!

A fifth Voice:

Have mercy!

A sixth Voice:

She is goddess!

A seventh Voice:

Unto her
Be worship! Let us tumble to the dust
The false Korkamedum!

An eighth Voice:

Cast out the god!

A ninth Voice:

Be thou our goddess!

The People:

Reign thou over us! . . .
Hurl down Korkamedum! . . . Drive forth the priests! . . .
Be thou our goddess! . . . Save us from the North! . . .
Her eyes are terrible! . . . She comes to save! . . .
Cast out the false Korkamedum! . . . Be thou
Our refuge! . . . She is daughter of the gods! . . .

To her be worship! . . . Take her to the shrine! . . .
Aye! take her to the shrine! . . . The gods have sent
A Star upon us! . . . Take her to the shrine! . . .

Enelus:

(*to the Girl*)
O goddess! suffer that thy servant lead
Thy glory to the temple!

(*She is silent.*) Goddess! Show
Thy will! The people wait thy word. Command!
Shall not we house thee in thy holy place?

(*She is silent.*)

A Voice:

Yea! let us lead her to the holy place!
Be swift, before she slay!

Enelus:

(*to the Girl*) O goddess! come
With us a little way. Thy holy place
Awaits thee, and the worship that is due.

The soldiers, rising, surround her. The phalanx moves toward the temple of Korkamedum, followed by the people.

ACT III

SCENE 3

A street of Vae, near her northern wall. Gannus, a baker, overtakes Lummo, an armorer, and Koan, a butcher, hurrying toward the center of the city. They walk together.

Gannus:

You go to see the Girl?

Koan:

The goddess.

Gannus:

True!
I have but heard.

Lummo:

And I.

Koan:

The news but crossed
My sill within a dozen breaths ago;
Wherefore I hasten.

Gannus:

We are late. What word
Had you?

Koan:

That she, not half an hour ago,
Appeared in flame before the eastern gates,

Which melted on their hinges, and fell down,
Revealing her.

Lummo:

And that a sword of light
Hung o'er her head, clutched in an unseen Hand.

Koan:

They say that when she speaks one hears no word,
But that a lyre seems sounded.

Lummo:

It is told
That she has eyes like stars grown furious.

Koan:

Men say she wears a flower in her hair
Whose face offends.

Lummo:

'T is told she drags with her
A scarlet thread that leads — no man knows whither!

Koan:

'T is said it leads to Heaven.

Gannus:

Or to Hell.
I think it is unravelled from the robe
A demon wears.

Lummo:

Be careful with your tongue,
If you would walk with *us*! Men say she comes
To bring destruction unto Vae.

Gannus:

That's us.
I like not the report! 'T is but a week
Since I was wed. Might it not be that Vae,
Adoring her, may put aside her wrath?

Koan:

'T was a foul deed men wrought in casting her
Upon the river reef.

Gannus:

And yet you see
It harmed her not. It may be she will spare
The city.

Lummo:

If she spare us, still there lies
Another menace.

Koan:

What is that?

Lummo:

You mean
You have not heard?

Koan:

Not I.

Lummo:

Not of the North,
And how Ducorial gave insult there,
So that their army hastens to our walls?

Koan:

I heard some rumor of it, but believed
The bladder held but wind of some one's breath.

Lummo:

It is not wind, unless a tempest's breath.
I trust we are provisioned for a siege.

Gannus:

For me, I have a thousand hoans of wheat,
And shall fare well. The price of bread will rise —
Yea! has already risen at your news.

Lummo:

What shall your silver profit, when the foe
Surmounts the wall? 'T is best men come to me
And purchase armor.

Koan:

Aye! and eat much flesh
To fortify their hearts. The price of sheep
Should much surpass the cost of bread. I know
That in some sieges men have eaten rats;
And glad were they to get so much of flesh.
I have nine sheep, and I shall purchase more
Before the sun sets.

Gannus:

Tell me what they'll live on.

Koan:

Ha! that I had not thought of!

Gannus:

On my wheat,
The price of which has risen once again.

Lummo:

Have done now with your chaffering! I vow
We'll all do well, and soon. The siege will prove
Most profitable.

Koan:

If the foe be kept
Without the wall!

Lummo:

May not it be, the gods,
Foreseeing this, have sent the Girl to Vae,
That she avert the doom that threatens us?

Gannus:

It seems most reasonable.

Lummo:

Were it not,
Why came she back to us a second time?

Koan:

What of Korkamedum? Not once but thrice
That scarlet one has saved us from the foe.
Shall we forsake his worship?

Gannus:

Let him prove
His strength once more. I'm none too sure of him.
Why, but a year ago the mice beset
My largest bin, and since have multiplied
Beyond compute, though I have sacrificed
Three goodly sheep to him.

Koan:

'T is true. You had
The sheep of me.

Gannus:

Is that omnipotence?
Why slew he not the mice, if he has power
And I, believing, pray?

Lummo:

The thing is dark.
Be not too hasty.

Gannus:

Let him rid my bin
Of the invader, then will I have faith
That he can check those others from the North.

Lummo:

What! would you then compare your wretched bin
With lordly Vae? Your mice with northern steel?
Would set a god to work at vermins' death?

Gannus:

I say that great things may be judged by small.
If he would have another sheep from me,
Then let him rid my bin of mice.

Lummo:

Ha! ha!
You and your mice! I vow Korkamedum
Has much upon his mind, what of the North
And your infliction! Ha! You'd make the god
A snapper-up of mice! If he succeed,
No doubt he'll be promoted to catch rats
For Koan!

Gannus:

Come not between me and my god!
He knows my need. . . Look! How the crowds increase!
They seem like rivers flowing to the sea.

Koan:

They march upon the temple. Hear them cry
"The Girl! Show us the Girl!"

Gannus:

And so they must!
Arkonion shall give us his account
Of why he would have slain her.

Lummo:

Yea! and why
He slew the Dreamer, he who led her in.

Koan:

What do you say? The noise has grown too great
For me to hear unless you shout.

Lummo:

(*loudly*) I said
Arkonion shall render an account
To us the people.

Gannus:

And Korkamedum
Shall render as exact a one to me!

They mingle with the crowd and become separated.

ACT III

SCENE 4

A half-hour later, within the temple of Korkamedum. Arkonion and the Girl, surrounded by the priests, stand before the god.

Heral:

What shall our judgment be? The people rage
And ask a sign. The fickle crowd forsakes
Korkamedum this hour.

Another priest:

Arkonion,
Beseech the god for light in this extreme!

Arkonion:

Peace! Do your hearts forsake me too? Fear not.
Put by misgivings. They shall have their sign.
Ye also.

Heral:

It is not a sign we seek,
But some device to set aside their doubt.
Dost thou not hear? The thunder of the mob
Invades the sanctuary. Dost thou hear?

The People:

Show us the Girl! . . . Down with Korkamedum! . . .

Bring forth the goddess! . . . Show her to us! . . .
Death
To those who serve Korkamedum! . . .

Arkonion:

(*to Heral*) I hear
Also I trust the wisdom that is mine.

Heral:

They beat upon the gates!

Arkonion:

They shall come in.

Heral:

But if they come, their violence will make
An end of priest and god.

Arkonion:

Nay! they shall find
Another worship.

Heral:

Whose?

Arkonion:

Dost thou not see
The one whom they would worship?

Heral:

Who? The Girl?
What bond hath she with us? They think we stand
Her desecrators.

Arkonion:

Does it matter, thou,
What they may think? I say their minds shall jump
As I decree.

Heral:

But hark to them! They rage!

The People:

Bring forth to us the goddess! . . . They do plot
Again to slay her! . . . Cast Korkamedum
Over the cliff! . . . Bring forth the goddess! . . .
Slay
Arkonion! . . . Give us the priests to burn! . . .
Show us the Girl! . . . They plot to murder her! . . .
Death to Arkonion! . . . Bring forth the Girl! . . .

Heral:

Thou hearest they demand her.

Arkonion:

They shall have
Their heart's desire.

Heral:

But we? What of our lives?

Arkonion:

Ye all shall live, and softly, as of old.

Heral:

Tell then thy purpose. What hast thou in mind?
How shall the mob be cozened?

Arkonion:

Bring ye ropes.

(*One goes upon the errand.*)

Is it for this that ye have pondered much,
And read our ancient scrolls, and learned the fate

Of Truth among the nations? She is stoned,
Except she come to them in pleasing garb,
With honey in her mouth, and 'round her head
Hope's iris. If she seek them otherwise,
As now, with eyes that trouble and arraign,
And flesh that hath no share in mystery,
She shall be slain, or stoned, or cast aside
As one of little worth.

(*The ropes are brought.*)

Set ye the ropes
Upon the neck of proud Korkamedum!

Heral:

Upon the god?

Arkonion:

If it enrage, his wrath
Shall visit me alone. Set ye the ropes
Upon his neck!

(*Priests ascend the altars at the god's left and right, and encircle his neck with ropes.*)

Take now each one his hold
Upon a rope, and drag him to his face!

Heral:

What! Dost thou rave? Shall we dethrone the god?

Arkonion:

Hark ye, without!

The People:

Down with Korkamedum! . . .
Show us the goddess! . . . Burn the priests! . . .
Bring fire! . . .

They plot to slay her! . . . Hurl Korkamedum
Over the cliff! . . . Bring forth the goddess! . . .
Death
To all the priests! . . .

Arkonion:

Will ye abide their love,
Or do as I command?

Heral:

Better to die
Beneath their feet, than flamed on by a god!

Arkonion:

I have invoked his wrath on me alone.
Ye are but agents of my will. Think you
Korkamedum would suffer an offense
If it were hateful to him? Hath he power
Or not? Shall he be modified by man?
If it were not his will, should we so much
As dream to desecrate him?

Heral:

But he gives
To each a will to desecrate, or not.

Arkonion:

Well knowing what the choice, ere made, shall be!
What freedom of the will is that? What right
To penalize the choice?

Heral:

I cannot say.
It is too deep a matter. But if thou

Accept all penalty, my fear is less,
And —

The People:

Burn the priests! . . . Cast down Korkamedum! . .
Bring forth the goddess! . . . They would slay her! . . . Death
To all the priests! . . .

Arkonion:

Pull strongly on the ropes.

(*They strain at the ropes. The god trembles, sways, and falls on his face before the altars, breaking into three parts as he strikes the granite floor.*)

Alas! most absolute Korkamedum!
How humble art thou at the last! Thy mouth
Bites now the granite floor! Nay! art thou then
Unglutted with the blood of brutes that bled,
That thou wouldst feed on stones?

The People:

Impale the priests! . . .
They slay her! . . . Burn the priests!

Arkonion:

(*to Heral*) Bring now to me
The robes within the golden chest.

(*Exit Heral. Arkonion draws a dagger from his bosom, and stabs the Girl to the heart. She falls at his feet. He tears his outer vestment in two parts, one of which he binds about the Girl's breast, and with the other wipes from the temple floor the blood she has shed.*)

Remove
The ropes, that none shall see them.

The People:

Bring ye forth
The goddess! . . . Burn the priests! . . . Impale
the priests! . . .
Hurl down the false Korkamedum!

Arkonion:

They roar —
The beasts without, but we shall turn their howls
To the sound of adoration. It is wise
To give them what they think their closest need,
If so be that ye give in subtle ways,
And give not as they deem ye give. This girl,
Goddess or not, shall be as one to them,
Nor shall they see wherein her beauty is,
Lest the sight make for madness, and the doom
Of us who still shall be the servitors
Of deity.

(*Heral returns with robes of the seven colors.*)

Behold! I wrap her thus.

(*He wraps her loosely in six of the robes.*)

Now take her up and bear her to the stone
Where stood Korkamedum. . . Drag to her sides
The left hand altar and the right, that they
Hold her erect. . . . And now, the seventh robe.

(*He wraps it about her head, so that a fold of it conseals her eyes.*)

Her flesh no more shall madden men. Her eyes
No more shall trouble those on whom she looks.
But they shall have some glimpse of loveliness,
Some shadow of her grace, cast by the lamp
That now shall burn before her. These our silks
Shall lure his gaze who else would scan her face
Too shrewdly. As she gleams before you now,
So shall the world behold her, nor detect
The mummy swathed in splendors. If she stink,
Burn incense, that its wafture on the gloom
May work a fragrant sorcery, and rouse
The eternal acquiescence of the sense.

The People:

They plot for her destruction! . . . Smash the
gates! . . .
Bring forth the goddess! . . . Hurl Korkamedum
Over the cliff! Impale the priests! . . . Bring forth
The goddess! They would murder her! . . .

Arkonion:

Unbar
The gates.

(*They do so. The mob swarms in, pausing at the sight of the fallen god and Arkonion at the side of the Girl.*)

O foolish people! Trust ye not
Our deeper wisdom? Know ye not we plan
Ever the good and holiness of all?
The goddess gleams before you. It is she
Who hath cast down the false Korkamedum.
She shall defend you in the years to be,
Accepting your devotion. Kneel and beg

That she forgive what seemed our sacrilege,
Tho 't was but wrought to prove her goddesshood.
As for the Dreamer, we shall build a shrine
Of jasper on the consecrated spot
Where he knew martyrdom. Pray now to him
And her whose power shall save the walls of Vae!

The people fall upon their knees. The low thunder of prayer arises. Arkonion lights the lamp before the Girl, and sinks also to his knees, together with the priests of the late god Korkamedum.

ACT III

SCENE 5

An hour later. The hills beyond the Uval. Egon, the poet, sits with Dendra, a shepherd's daughter, in the shade of a wild almond tree. She sings.

Come with the morning, O my faun!
  I am the dew, thy kiss the light
That makes of me a star of dawn.
  Thou art the wind from out the night.

O thou that art so fleet, delay,
  Lest the returning sun, supreme,
Touch me to mist. So soon his ray
  Must reach the shadow where I gleam!

Drain me, O wind! To thee alone
  A sacrifice I offer up.
Make me a little while thine own —
  My soul the wine, my flesh the cup!

Egon:

The almond petals fall, like ghosts of dew,
And like a ghost, in silence.

Dendra:

Do not speak
Of ghosts. Dost frighten me! Oh! gaze no more
Upon the broken blossom. Are my breasts
Not white as they, and fragrant? Dost thou tire
Of me already?

Egon:

Nay! thou art too sweet —
Sweet as the eyes in which we first see love,
As I first see it in thine own.

Dendra:

I think
Thou foolest me.

Egon:

I fool thee? Ah! thine eyes!
The hue of mountains very far away!

Dendra:

But thou hast looked in other eyes!

Egon:

No more!
I do repent me that I ever sought
The city's hidden scarlet!

Dendra:

Wilt thou be
Forever true henceforth?

Egon:

Oh! Doubt me not!
Purple of years that were, of years to be,
Holds round me an horizon dim and wide,
Where fade all forms that once I found so dear.
Thou art the center now of all my world,
And I forget all faces for thy face.
They end in thine.

Dendra:

Was there no girl more fair
Than I, in all Ducorial's court?

Egon:

Not one!
Yet there were many who looked love at me
Across his pools of perfume, when the fans
Of gorgeous plumage swept that fragrant dusk,
And lyres were moon to undersurfs of sound.
Ah, yes! I was desired!

Dendra:

But didst not love
The fairest of them.

Egon:

Nor most passionate.

Dendra:

I would I could believe thee!

Egon:

See this ring:
It was put on my finger by a witch
Who prophesied that I should love but one,
And she a maid whose name began with "D."
Now dost thou not believe?

Dendra:

I do believe!
Why toldst thou not all this before?

Egon:

The time
Seemed not propitious. There are times and times.
I sought the better, and alone with thee.

Dendra:

Thou are most wise! And thou art beautiful,
And strong, and good!

Egon:

Ah! not to such degree
As thy young heart imagines.

Dendra:

Thou art dear!

Egon:

I trust I may be ever dear to thee.
Love hath the past, the future, and the now.
Thou art all love — a part of that Unseen
Whose coming every flower seems to wait.
Thy gentle words are as a flock of doves
That pass on murmuring wings to Paradise.
Thine eyes are true, and hold that tender love
The years take not away. I cannot dream
Of lovelier than thou — nay! not in Hell,
Nor gardens where celestial dews have wept.
Dear is thy very shadow! Thou dost seem
To roam a nether land that I forget,
Below the haunting moons of old romance.
The starlight is thy memory. I would —

Dendra:

I would that I were sure about those girls!

Egon:

What! When I told thee of the witch's word?
Thou doubtest yet?

Dendra:

Woman was born to doubt,
I often think. Nay! I believe! But swear
Thou hatest them!

Egon:

I hate them.

Dendra:

So do I!
A pest on Vae, and all her courtesans!
I hope — what do they yonder on the cliff?
(*pointing to the western bounds of Vae.*)

Egon:

It is so far I cannot surely tell. . .
I think they roll a bulk of ruddy rock
Toward the cliff's edge. . . 'T is that. . . They near
the verge. . .
It falls. . . The Uval's towering foam ascends. . .
Now it is gone forever. . .

Dendra:

Look! They roll
Another block.

Egon:

It tumbles. What a splash!

Dendra:

Comes now a third! What can it be?

Egon:

It falls. . .
More sound and foam, for those who hear and see;
And then the silence, and the Uval's tide
Below the quiet. . . Nay, I do not know
What fell into the river — nor do care.
Ever the people have some folly on.
It keeps —

Dendra:

Ha! look beyond! The western hills
Begin to darken with a multitude
Of sable horsemen!

Egon:

Yea! and south and north
That flood rolls down! It is Corvannon's king
Who sends his army on them! I recall
That dead Ducorial made jest of him,
One summer day, when larks were on the wing,
And no man thought of care or pain or death.
Now comes the reckoning.

Dendra:

Think'st thou that Vae
Can hold the walls?

Egon:

That army is too great.
How the black legions, like a fog from Hell,
Pour down the mountains! Vae must fall.

Dendra:

Hast thou
No kin within her walls?

Egon:

Within or out,
No kin, and no one dear to me but thee.

Dendra:

How long shall I be dear?

Egon:

Forever, Love!
Each evening star shall be our bridal lamp.
Let the winds raven, and let midnight build
Its icy altars to infinity:
We shall be close in wakefulness or sleep,
And dream, until to-morrow stain our east,
Beyond the dark and voiceless towers of Vae.

Dendra:

And when we too are dead?

Egon:

I do not know,
But know that life is sweet when shared with thee.
If that be all, at least we have it now,
And fair it is to have! The butterfly
Dips to the flower.

Dendra:

The butterfly and rose —
They go so soon!

Egon:

Yet are they now, and fair.
Child of illusion and of lust, what god
Shall tell thee more? I turn to thee and find

The grief and rapture of the Here and Now,
Knowing that Here and Now for us are all.

Dendra:

The worm felt not the butterfly in him:
The butterfly, perchance, feels not a star
Whose light may wake in him.

Egon:

Ah! keep thy dream,
My lovely one! Who knows? It may come true.
But we are sure of this bright morning. Come,
And take this pathway to the myrtle glen,
Whence none can see the menaced walls of Vae,
Nor care which army triumph and destroy.

Dendra:
(*pointing*)

Ah! see!

(*He turns, to find the Girl standing behind them.*)

Egon:

Thou followest! I fled from thee
Because thy gaze was unendurable.
Nay! nay! I will not meet thine eyes! Depart,
And leave me to my fleeting happiness!

(*She holds out her arms to him.*)

I cannot go with thee! I will not take
Thy lonely road!

(*She points to the snowy heights of the western mountains.*)

I say I will not go!

(*She passes up the slope of the hill, looking backward to him at times.*)

I fled from thee. Fly thou as well from me.
I am not worthy of thy loveliness.
I am not strong enough to bear thy kiss.

(*She vanishes beyond the crest of the hill.*)

Dendra:

My faithful Love! Thou wouldst not go with her,
The scornful one, the shameless!

Egon:

She is not
For me. In thine illusion, not in her's,
I seek nepenthe, drowning at thy breast.
Her home is but the wind upon the snows,
Or the cold star above them. 'T is on thine
That I would know forgetfulness or death.

They pass, hand in hand, down the slope to the glen of myrtles. The sound of trumpets comes from the city Vae, across the river Uval.

THE END

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